2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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man and his *ora jalnywaja* might exchange presents of sheep, the gifts always being presented through a third party. 602

The husband of the sister, either the *nyimia* or the *nyiwa*, is treated in the same way as the husband of the *nyiwaja* and privileges can be claimed from him; the husband of the *nina* is also respected. Thus, though *ora* is a reciprocal term, the respect and deference shown is not mutual. The *ora* to whom deference is paid are the wife's male and female relatives. The most important of these are the mother, the father, the *na* and the *una*, the *uma* and the *umia* of the wife, all of whom are treated with ceremonial avoidance; the *uwa*, though respected, are not avoided. The *ora* from whom a man claims privileges are the husbands of sisters and cousins, especially the husbands of the *nyimia*, *nyima*, and *nywaja* from whose bride-wealth he has received cattle.

There is no avoidance between women; a woman does not avoid her husband's mother. 606

A man must kill a bull at the death feast of an *ora*, the father, mother or brother of his wife, and if he lives near his wife's family he kills a sheep on the day of the death. He must not see the corpse or assist at the burial. 607 764

From the above it will be seen that the conception of *ora* is far from simple. It might at first be supposed that anyone of the wife's clan was *ora* and must consequently be treated with respect, but this is not so; the wife's sister, who is naturally of her clan, is not *ora* and is treated with familiarity; the wife's father's sister (her *waja*) is not avoided. Unfortunately we did not ascertain how the latter was addressed, and do not know of any special duties of the *waja* towards her brother's daughter, though those to his son are important. But the wife's mother's brother (her *na*), who must belong to a different clan from the wife, is *ora*. 602

There seem to be four aspects of the *ora* relationship:—

(1) The primary attitude to the wife's mother, extended on classificatory lines.

(2) The attitude towards those relatives of the wife to whom she stands in some definite relationship.

(3) The attitude a man observes towards the husbands of his own female relatives. Relationships (2) and (3) are reciprocal but the behaviour pattern is not identical.

(4) A woman's attitude towards the relatives of her husband.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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and habitat. The spirits of the bush are we believe in the main unimportant, but the river people and their river cattle play a more considerable part in the mythology of the people. One of the groups of people whom Nyakang found in the land were fish-men, or river-men with the power of turning into fish, while the mysterious cows whose dung provided the "ashes of denying" (p. 102) had their original home in the river.

It is convenient to consider the cult of the dead Shilluk kings apart from that of Nyakang at his cenotaph shrines, but it must be remembered that in every king there is immanent the spirit of Nyakang, so that the worship rendered them at their grave shrines is ultimately only part of the cult of Nyakang.

Like the cenotaph shrines of Nyakang the royal grave shrines are called *kengo*, as opposed to the graves of commoners for which the word is *roro*.[1] Though smaller, they resemble the shrines of Nyakang in appearance, for the roofs of their constituent huts terminate in ostrich egg and spear-head. The guardians or priests (*bareth*) of these shrines are of the same class as those of the *kengo Nyakang*, viz. elderly women, often widows of the dead king, and old men, his former servants, or their descendants who have reached the requisite age, or, as a last resource when none of these can be found, old women or old men not specially connected with the dead king. Just as no one except the *bareth Nyakang* is allowed to enter the shrines of Nyakang, so no stranger may enter the royal grave shrines. A royal daughter never becomes a guardian of a shrine, but she may enter the grave shrine of her dead father and rub her hands on its floor for a blessing whenever she likes, as may the royal sisters. It seemed that these privileges did not extend to the shrines of other dead kings, nor even to the enclosed space around them. Should the spirit of a dead king appear to a royal daughter or sister in a dream and demand an offering, she would take a sheep to the guardians of the tomb and give it to one of them to sacrifice in the same way as a commoner. There are cattle belonging to the grave shrines of the kings, and offerings are made as at the shrines of Nyakang. Thus, when the millet crop threatens to fail, or epidemic sickness to attack the cattle, Nyakang or one of his successors will appear to someone in a dream and demand a sacrifice. This is told to the king, who will immediately send a cow and a bullock to one or more of the shrines

[1] So kings do not "die", but "go away", and in addressing the king a special court language is employed.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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643 778 764 of Nyakang, if Nyakang has appeared, or to the grave shrine of the appropriate king if the dreamer has seen one of the later Shilluk kings. The bullock is killed and the cow added to the herd belonging to the shrine.

It is usual for the harvest ceremony (already alluded to on p. 80) to be performed at the royal grave shrines as well as at the shrines of Nyakang, though it is recognized that this is not absolutely necessary. Again, each king soon after his installation sends or should send presents to the grave shrines of his predecessors, treating these in the same way as he treats the shrines of Nyakang, though the presents need not be so lavish. So, too, sick folk send animals to be sacrificed as offerings at the shrines of their kings, just as they do to the shrines of Nyakang.

771 643 At this point it will be convenient to anticipate the conclusions to which the next few pages will lead, and point out that the actual working religion of the Shilluk is the cult of Nyakang, depending upon the acceptance of the following beliefs: (1) the immanence in each king (*reth*) of Nyakang, (2) the conviction that the king must not be allowed to become ill or senile, lest with his diminishing vigour the cattle should sicken and fail to bear their increase, the crops should wither in the fields, and men, stricken with disease, should die in ever increasing numbers. It follows that the *reth* of the Shilluk must be numbered among those rulers whom Sir James Frazer has called "divine kings", and though, as in many instances in other countries, every precaution is taken against accidental death, the Shilluk kings are (or were) killed in order to avoid those disasters which their senescence was thought to bring upon the state.

643 Although there is no doubt that the kings of the Shilluk were killed ceremonially when they began to show signs of old age or ill-health, it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly what was done, and a good deal of Shilluk folklore is enshrined in the accounts commonly given of the killing of the *reth*. According to these, any royal son (*nyireth*) had the right to attempt to kill the king, and if successful to reign in his stead. The killing could only take place at night, for during the day the king would be surrounded by his [644] friends and bodyguard and no aspiring successor would have the least chance of harming him. At night the king's position was very different; alone in his enclosure with his wives, and with no men to protect him except a few herdsmen whose huts were situated at a little distance, he was represented as passing the night in constant

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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Death and Funeral Ceremonies

The Shilluk idea of the spiritual make-up of man is neither simple nor easy to understand. Every living man has both *wei* and *tipo*, the former signifying "breath", "life", the latter "shadow", "image", as in water or mirror. We have already referred to the *cen* of one dying in anger and malevolence (p. 97), and there is a word *aneko*, meaning ghost, i.e. the spirit of one dead. So far we are reasonably certain of our facts, but there may be an element called *winyo* (lit. bird) of whose functions we can predicate nothing.

No death occurred in the villages we visited whilst we were among the Shilluk.

According to Hofmayr, death may be hastened when there is much suffering or if the agony is long drawn out. He states that a prolonged period of immobility of the body is taken for death; the women immediately begin to wail, the dying man is declared dead, his face is covered with a cloth, and the grave is dug.[1] Burial is at full length, a few paces from the door of the house in which the deceased lived. The grave is dug by old men, mostly relatives. A skin is placed in the grave and the body laid upon it wrapped in a white cloth (this is a recent introduction) and covered with another skin. The position of the hands is uncertain; we were told that they were laid between the knees, and also that they were placed in front of the face. Nothing is buried with the corpse, but later a hole is made near and objects placed in it.

Westermann's text, from which the following account is taken, is of special interest as it contains minute details of Shilluk behaviour; it is, however, too long for inclusion and we give only the salient features. It should be noted that his description applies to rich and important men; with a single exception the graves that we saw had no cattle horns on them, and we believe that for a poor man cattle are not always killed. The use of a bier is not invariable:—

When a man dies two fowls are killed, one being placed at the head of the deceased. An ox and a goat are also sacrificed. Beads are tied round the ankles of the men who prepare the grave:—

> "The man is buried thus: Some men dig the hole, and some men skin the cow [ox in the early part of the account] . . . the hide is cut into strips, and a bier is [made] . . ., his wife is called, she is to hold the feet of the dead man, and the man is laid on the bier. His wife (or: the women belonging

[1] Op. cit., 299.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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PLATE X

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342
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Shilluk homestead, grave in foreground

A
142
291
301
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516

Anuak

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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766 to the family) sweeps the place where his feet lie; and a female relative of the dead man . . . throws away the hearth-stones. . . . A goat . . . is killed . . . the drum is beaten, and the people begin to weep (mourn); as soon as the weeping stops, the people dance mourning dances . . . go around in a procession dancing. . . .

"A fence is made around the grave; the people wash themselves in the river. . . . Oboyo (a plant) is brought, and a fowl, the people are beaten (touched) with the oboyo. . . . The eating-tools of the dead man are burnt, and the people rub the ashes on their forehead; . . . [after] four days . . . beer is made, the beer for rubbing mud on the back of the dead man . . . and poured on the back of the dead man (on his grave). Mud is . . . put on the back of the dead man . . . beer is brought, and again is poured on the grave. The ox is speared; the drum is beaten, the people take their arms and make war-plays, and go around in procession."[1]

We may add that after the burial all the people bathe in the river. [765] No food taboos are laid on the mourners, who should shave the head, put aside all beads, wear a cow-rope round the neck, and abstain from dancing during the period of mourning. Any milk that has been standing in the house of the deceased is poured upon his grave, as well as some beer. Hofmayr states that young wives or parents bid farewell to the dead before the grave is filled in, and that very emotional scenes are not uncommon.

764 Many years ago we witnessed a Shilluk burial at Omdurman. Women bearing spears went round and round the grave, dancing, while other women beat drums and shook bells. Later the men danced in war panoply with spear and shield. Dr. Tucker tells us that on the occasion of a burial he saw a bull chased through the settlement with loud yells and killed outside by armed men, who on their return danced round the grave, making as though to attack it, while the women wailed. About a month after burial people collect for 765 a further ceremony.

Dura for beer is collected from all the people. . . . The beer is strained . . . the drum is beaten. An ox is speared, goats are killed. . . . The next morning . . . four cows are killed in [the house enclosure of the deceased] . . . and four . . . in the middle of the village. Then all, all, all the people come, a great many of Shilluks. When it is afternoon, the people mourn, and four cows are killed by the people in the bush. Cooking-pots are carried out, and a hole is dug for them (and for the other household-things of the dead man) near the place where the head of the dead man lies. And two pots, and a gourd, and a small pot for beer, a mat for covering food, and two dishes, all these things are broken and thrown into the hole. . . . The horns of cattle . . . they are brought . . . they are [placed] on the grave, so that they may be seen by the people. . . ."[2]

[1] Westermann, op. cit., 112–13. [2] Westermann, loc. cit.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

766 *Kwanyireth* are buried in the same way as commoners. We saw an oval mound in one village surrounded by a fence, and were told that it was the grave of a *kwanyireth*. Such a fence is also built round the grave of an *ajuago*; those we saw were in the centre of the village, and it may be that this position was chosen purposely. The wives of the kings, the *bareth*, are buried by the *orora*, inside their huts (not outside, as commoners are), which though left standing for some time are eventually pulled down. If a king's wife falls ill she will if possible return to her own village to die, and will be buried there.

764 Huts of the recently deceased are marked on each side of the door
789 with vertical stripes of white clay of about a hand's breadth, to ward off evil and the vengeance of the deceased.

LITTLE-KNOWN SHILLUK-SPEAKING TRIBES

600 Besides the Shilluk, a number of other Shilluk-speaking tribes exist in the Sudan. Little is known of any of these, though we are less ignorant of the Acholi than of the other peoples. These tribes include the following:—

The Anuak (called Bar by the Nuer) of the Sobat river, extending along the Baro and Akobo rivers into Abyssinia.

The Luo, the so-called Shilluk-speaking Jur. As stated in Chapter I, the use of the word *jur* (Dinka, "stranger") as a tribal name has caused much confusion in the identification of the minor Shilluk-speaking tribes, a confusion which has tended to obscure the ethnology of the whole south-western Sudan. We shall therefore avoid the use of this word, noting that the Luo are the remains of the "greater Luo people" referred to on page 37.

The Belanda, a composite tribe with a Shilluk-speaking section calling themselves Bor (p. 492), whose territory lies to the south and south-west of the Luo.

Westermann mentions a tribe called Ber, living south of the Bongo and east of the Belanda on the right bank of the Sueh river.[1] We cannot identify this tribe, and suspect that there has been confusion with the Bor of the Belanda complex.

The Dembo, whom Westermann places north-west of the "Jur on both sides of the Bahr Dembo".[2]

[1] Op. cit., 31. [2] Loc. cit.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

845 BEARING AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

On the average number of children in a family vide page XXIII. The birth of twins is regarded as the greatest of good fortune.

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Affection of parents for their children is not wanting. The mother often places the infant in a long basket or bed made of grass; this she carries on her head or covers with a mat in some secure place, while the child sleeps. Education is limited to teaching the children the work and skill which the parents command.

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The naming of the children is done by some member of the family, in most cases by the parents or grandparents. The name generally has some connection with circumstances attending the birth. The name *Ago* ("she died") is often given when the birth occurs in close proximity to a death in the family. *Newnilo* is a very common name; it indicates that the mother of the child has prayed for a child by sweeping a sacred house (a temple of Nyikang or of some other ancient king) with a bunch of straw. Men often acquire a second name when grown up; this one is in most cases called after the name of a cow or an ox.

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When the boys are from thirteen to fifteen years old, they start the cultivation of a small field of their own, for the result of which they try to acquire cattle.

882

— The boys and young men of a village born in the same year form a companionship, all member of such a "class" having a common name. The young men of a village do not sleep in their parents' houses, but their common sleeping place is in the cow-shed of the village. The act of sleeping in the barn is called "sleeping in the ashes" from the fact that they during this time sleep in the ashes of the fire kept smouldering in the barn.

567 SLAVES

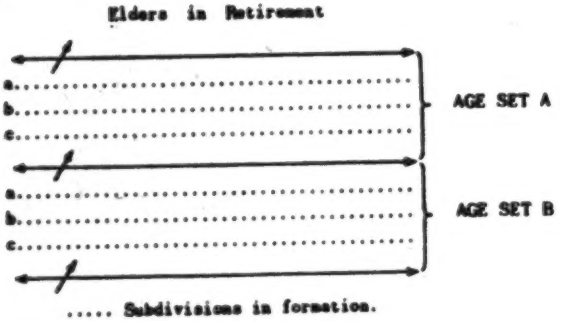
The Shilluks have some slaves secured before the present régime. Some of these are Shilluks, others are from the Kordofan and also from farther up the Nile. They were secured in war or purchased from the Arabs. In single cases Shilluk parents sold their children for food in time of famine, or gave them away to chiefs.

764 BURIAL

When a grown-up man dies, he is buried in or just before his hut. An ox is killed as a funeral feast, and its horns are planted on the grave so that they are visible from without. Women and children are buried in the bush. — For a description of a burial vide pages 111 and 135.

Some time after the death of a man a funeral ceremony is held; it takes place when the property of the deceased is divided among his heirs; this may be from about one month to one year after the person has died. The warriors of the neighbouring villages are invited. An ox is killed on the occasion. The ceremony consists in dancing, making displays of arms, feasting on the meat of the slain ox, and drinking merisa. The women also partake in it. Whether any religious actions are connected with it, I do not know.

thus occurs periodically. The subdivisions of any age set are known as 'head', 'neck' and 'middle'.



..... Subdivisions in formation.

As new subdivisions are continually being formed by initiated youths the immediate age set into which they enter grows too large. In addition the oldest subdivisions of the age set, comprising the married men and fathers, begin to die out or are ready for retirement. A new grouping of all the subdivisions is achieved by the *ngol* or cutting ceremony, when age sets are ceremonially divided into distinct units. The process is shown in the diagram. Surviving members of age set A (the older subdivisions) pass completely out of the age organisation into retirement. Older subdivisions of age set B pass into age set A to replace those retiring, while the most recently formed subdivisions pass for the first time into age set B. Thus, room is made for the formation of new subdivisions and there is a moving of subdivisions through the age sets or the formation of newly constituted age sets.

The retired age sets take no part in fighting or in ceremonies connected with the age-set organisation. The reshuffling occurs at the induction of the very young subdivisions, the members of which are anxious to have further privileges and a higher status. On ceremonial occasions the age sets have special parts of the animals killed, the highest age set eats the back and chest, the lower will eat the hump and legs only. According to Howell the regrouping of subdivisions is often the subject of much dispute, particularly between the two subdivisions which will be separated by the new line of division.

There are few occasions when the age set functions. At funerals the men are organised according to age sets as also at beer feasts when each sits in a special place and sings its own song.

Age sets emphasize the solidarity of the settlement by organising the generations within it. Each settlement unit has its own age-set organisation and there is no connection between the age sets of different settlements, though they all have similar forms and play similar parts in the settlement units. The age sets have little political importance, save that they constitute a bond of unity within the settlement, and this is clear

In addition, the

Shilluk believe in *cen* which is thought to be the malevolent element that persists after the death of one who has died with a grievance and is angry at some wrong that has been done to him.(1) They also speak of *winyo*, meaning a bird, but Seligman was unable to discover what this meant.

A dead body is buried at full length, a few paces from the door of the house in which the deceased lived. The grave is usually dug by elderly male relatives. The body is wrapped in skins, and sacrifices of oxen, goats and fowls are made after the burial, according to the family wealth. The mourners bathe in the river; no food taboos are laid on them but they shave their heads and do not wear ornaments or go to dances during the period of mourning. After a month has passed the mortuary ceremonies are held, a number of sacrifices are made and beer is brewed for the mortuary feast. According to Westermann the horns of an ox are often placed on the grave.(2)

THE ANUAK

Detailed information on the Anuak is derived almost entirely from two articles by Evans-Pritchard.

ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

The Anuak are, like the Shilluk, a riverain people and their villages are distributed along the banks of rivers in the Eastern Sudan and in Ethiopia. In the western regions of Anuakland the ecological conditions are somewhat different from those in the east. The western areas are true savannah, flat, almost treeless grassland, which is flooded in the wet season. In the east there is forest savannah which gradually turns into tropical rain forest. In the rainy season the western half of Anuakland is cut off from the eastern half by deep water-courses and swamps. These factors have had considerable repercussions on the political organisation of the country and largely determine the distribution of the villages and the economy.

In the savannah areas of the west, villages are built on rising ground at the edge of the flood plains and the occupants may have to move during the rainy season for fishing, fresh pastures and for drinking water. Villages built some miles back from the river (owing to flooding during the rains), also have to move. For such villages there is a wet-season village site and a dry-season village site. The regions in the west are thinly populated; small independent villages are strung out 5-20 miles apart and often with swamps and rivers in between so that in the wet season a village community may be completely cut off from the rest of the country for several months. In certain localities, as along the Gila river, villages are surrounded by dense beds of reeds and it is impossible to reach them except by the few paths available. Such villages are very difficult to attack. Where the villages of the savannah areas are not protected by these banks of reeds they are, or were in the past, protected by stockades and moats, the homesteads being closely wedged together owing to the lack of space on the mound occupied.

(1) Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, p.97.
(2) Westermann, *The Shilluk People*, 1912, p.113.

.. 11: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918)1919 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

754 The evil medicine man takes advantage of the carelessness of the people. A man may be gathering the old stalks on his field to burn them, but fails to burn them that evening. An evil medicine man comes at night and burns them, and then the owner gets the ashes on his hands, and his hands swell. Or the large stick used in planting the grain may be left in the field at night, and the owner of the malignant power enters the field, and burns it. The grain will grow well till it gets to be almost ready to yield the harvest, when it is burned by the sun so that it dies. Water that is left in the garden over night may be defiled, and the people who drink it die.

The evil charmer is envious of the successful fisherman. He gets a bone of a fish that the man has caught. The fish bone is burned in the fire. That works a charm on the fish spear, so that in the future it will not be able to take the fish.

Accidents which terminate in blindness are caused by the evil medicine men.

513 In the hot season, when the people sleep in their yards, the evil medicine man comes at night and sprinkles blood on the sleepers, and they die.

751 After a person has been buried, the grave is watched for three or four
764 nights lest the man of evil should take a bit of the earth, and by working a charm on it kill the whole family of the deceased; but after a short time he can not work that charm, so at the end of the fourth day the watchmen are dismissed.

751 When with an evil medicine man it is well to be on the alert. When a
754 person is sitting with a man of that class, when he gets up he should brush the ground where he has been sitting so as not to leave an imprint of his body for the man to use in his witchcraft. When a person sees such a man walking behind him, he should return, and if the man is stepping exactly in his tracks, he should be taken and made to ransom the man as he was killing him. It is not safe to sleep in the same house with them, as they may defile a person in his sleep. In eating with them it is best to stop before a person is satisfied. To strike an evil medicine man is to invite certain death. The people have the habit of asking a person to wash their
515 backs when they are bathing. Should a person ask an evil medicine man to do that favour for him he will be very itchy all that night, and later have sores all over his back.

18: Howell E-5 (1937) 1941 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

535 881 leave the dancing ground. Within a few minutes the village is clear of all guests, those who are unable to stand being swept along in the rush.

881 431 Before dancing for the first time the initiate is usually presented with two spears by his father. The sons of rich men are presented with a bull (*Walh Owono*) as well.[8] This bull is treated with great care [553] and affection by the young warrior and he is given a new name by his age-mates—taken from the colour of the bull and they alone may call him so. Theoretically the bull is kept throughout his life, a new [583] one of similar colour and markings being substituted when it dies. It is never given as bride-wealth. The initiates then visit their relatives 881 in the settlement and after a short period of travel return home. In 574 the past these visits were probably on a wider scale and according to Hofmayer "after the dance it is the custom for the Shilluk initiates [114 171] to lead a nomadic life for a time, traversing the country from one end to the other." This statement is probably an exaggeration, but a period of wandering visits is common among African peoples before final reintegration into the community in adult status.

535 764 At the *Cong Bul*, initiates are introduced to their new privileges together, but the rest of the warriors are not drawn up in age-sets. At the "*Kwogo*" and "*Yok*," which are funeral ceremonies, the male 881 Shilluk are organized according to their respective age-sets. There 561 are few other occasions when the age-set system functions at all.

476 561 Among the Shilluk the more arduous processes of cultivation are carried out communally. A man will invite his neighbours and relatives to help him in his fields and will provide merissa for them afterwards. The helpers are not necessarily his age-mates and it does not appear

[178] 8. The Shilluk say that the custom is dying out and that few fathers have bulls to spare. In any case the youth will take the name of one of his father's bulls. The *Walh Owono* is a source of great pride to its owner and songs are composed about it which are sung for the benefit of girls.

An approximate translation of the song of Ajak, an inhabitant of the Zeraf mouth is as follows:

"I have a grey bull, a great bull,
I am going to Golbaign to buy a bell,
A bell for the bull that lives in
My fathers byre."

19: Howell & Thomson E, G-5 (1943-1944)1946
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

to lift. However the delay was quite simply explained. Nyikang was not ready. A hitch had occurred in finding the cloth for his body. (A new effigy of Nyikang is made for each *reth*, and on the death of a *reth* the old effigy is destroyed). Another delay was caused by the Ororo messengers sent from Fashoda to Akurwa to say that all was ready. They dawdled on the way. 643 778

On the 26th February "Nyikang" and "Dak" started on their way. First they must beat the bounds of Shilluk country proper, and they went to Moro, some five miles north of Kaka market. The procession was first observed in the section of "Thorr" just south of Kaka.

Nyikang and Dak are carried by men of the Kwanyikwom clan who live at Akurwa. They are surrounded by the youths of the Kwanyikwom carrying whips to drive away the inquisitive or profane. As Nyikang passes through a section of the Shilluk country, the men of the section escort him to their borders. Anyone who is beaten by the whips of the Kwanyikwom is said to be held to ransom until he pays a fine of a goat. There are various offences for which Nyikang penalizes people on the way. Nyikang's image is made from ostrich feathers and bamboo. It is therefore sacrilege for a Shilluk to be seen with an ostrich feather in his hair or carrying bamboo. The ritual of burial must be completed for all who have recently died. Nyikang must not pass anything unclean. In Nyikang's presence Shilluk must not present a warlike appearance. A man carrying a spear may not have a shield as well, and a man with a shield is only allowed a millet stalk. Nyikang advances with his son Dak at a loping trot of about 6 m.p.h. escorted by the Kwanyikwom and the men of the section through which he is passing. As he approaches a village the people dash out as if to ward him off, but quickly over-powered they soon join the procession. It is usual for gifts of a sheep or a goat to be presented to or exacted by Nyikang, and it was noticeable how all small stock and fowls were either shut up or driven away from the vicinity of Nyikang, for Nyikang has a right to anything he fancies. As Nyikang proceeds with Dak his son beside him, the escort chants [614] 643 688 778 [764] 643 778 [481] [431]

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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Whatever the cause of death, burial follows at once except in the case of a king, when there is a short lying in state. If the deceased is a Nyireth or a chief, he is buried under the floor of his principal hut. A bull is killed, the meat of which is eaten by the grave-diggers, whilst the skin is cut into strips and woven across a quickly fashioned wooden, four-legged frame to make a bed or a bier. The body is washed and the head shaved. Arms, neck and waist are adorned with beads and a leopard skin fastened round the loins. The corpse is then rolled in a new white cloth and around this is bound a cow skin. It is then placed on the bed with a hen under the head. Meanwhile the work of digging the grave has been going on apace. This is a very difficult task, particularly in the dry season when the ground is as hard as concrete. The pit made is a very large one, since it has to accommodate the complete bier. It is taken down to a depth of six or seven feet and then a large cavity is cut in the side, large enough to contain the bed. The body resting on the bier is then lowered into the grave and fitted into the cavity. As this is being done the wailing of the women fills the air and the men salute the dead prince or chief, clashing their spears on their shields and singing songs in his praise. The principal wife takes two handfuls of sweepings from the floor and, standing with her back to the grave, throws them over her shoulders into the grave. Then she casts in two handfuls of mud, again standing with her back to the grave but with her hands by her sides, so that she throws the mud behind her. After the grave is filled in, all the mourners wash themselves in the river. They wear ropes round their necks as a sign of mourning, shave their heads and remove all beads and ornaments, and during the period of mourning should abstain from dancing. Four days after the burial the mourners gather again for the completion of the grave. Beer has been prepared and some if it is poured on the grave; the mound is then plastered over with mud and neatly smoothed and finished off. A short funeral dance follows after which all the mourners partake of the remainder of the beer.

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766 The final ceremonies take place after an interval of a month or two. Cattle, varying in number according to the [782] eminence and wealth of the dead man's family, are driven in for sacrifice and distribution, after being slaughtered, among the participants. The men of the district march in, [535] village by village, and perform the funeral dance, first encircling the village on the outside, then saluting the tomb of the deceased; they advance, clashing spear on shield, to kneel on one knee before the grave, then retire and finally encircle the village, this time on the inside, before giving place to the next company. The whole performance is accompanied by the thudding of the drums and the chanting of [533] the praises of Nyikang and the dead prince. This dance concludes all public remembrance of the dead man. No record is made or kept of the day or month of his death and so nothing in the nature of an anniversary ceremony takes place. The hut under which he is buried is allowed to fall into ruins and [778] thus forms a tumulus over the grave. The place is then made tidy and a reed or thorn fence erected around it to preserve it from profane use.

The household utensils of the dead man are either burned or buried on the day of the funeral, but the rest of 768 his property, including his wives—for they are reckoned as 428 his chattels for which he paid so many head of cattle—is inherited by his relatives according to the directions given by the deceased. If he left no instructions for the dividing of his goods everything belongs to his eldest son, but he is expected to give a share to his brothers and his father's principal male relatives, brothers and half-brothers. The dead man's spears, his canoe and the necklace of large white beads, a token of his dignity, belong to the eldest son absolutely.

764 The funeral of a common Colo and the consequent cere- [565] monies differ in some respects from those of a Nyireth. The body is washed and shaved and adorned with beads, but since no commoner is allowed to wear a leopard skin, the skin of a serval cat is fastened round the loins. If the dead

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person is a woman or a girl, a skirt is substituted for the skin, and for the girl some strings of yellow beads are added. If the family can afford it, it will buy a couple of yards of white cotton cloth to serve as a winding sheet and a cow skin is bound round this. The grave of a commoner is not dug in the hut itself but outside, near the compound. It is put near the surrounding reed fence, in a place where passers-by will not walk over it. As for a chief, the grave is excavated to a depth of about six feet but it is not nearly so wide, since the body is not buried lying on a bier, but is placed on the bare earth. The niche or alcove is cut out of the side, however, and a hen is placed under the head. During the funeral the mourners wail in the customary manner, and this is the signal for the warriors, who hitherto have been out of sight in the cattle byre, to charge forward, armed as usual with spears and shields, to salute their dead comrade. The grave is mudded over on the fourth day with the customary beer drinking and libation over the grave, and the relatives abstain for a while from dancing and the use of personal adornments.

The mourning is not really completed, however, until the deceased person has been commemorated at a funeral dance. This is a strict obligation upon the relatives, even though it may be a year or more before it is fulfilled. Since the commoner is not sufficiently important or wealthy to be given a dance all to himself, funeral dances are held periodically in the principal villages. The district turns up in force for these communal 'All Souls' days, for besides the attraction of the dance—and any Shilluk will cheerfully walk miles just for the pleasure of a dance—there is also the extra treat of a share in the meat when the affair is over. Everybody who is commemorating his dead must give an offering, a bull if the deceased is a man or a woman, a sheep if a child. The dance follows the pattern of the more important funeral dances. There is no tomb, however, so the drums mounted in forked sticks are made the focus of attention. The warriors, armed with spear and shield, make the customary encirclement of the village and then advance to the drums, chanting their

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and so we parted. The next evening, after tea, I mounted my bicycle and pedalled leisurely towards the village. Half-way there I met the father of one of the school boys, and we chatted for a few minutes about the progress, or rather lack of progress, his son was making. Then he asked me casually where I was going, and I replied just as casually that I was going to Pabiu to baptize so-and-so. 'So-and-so?' he said. 'He died half an hour ago.' I stared at him in amazement for a moment, and then, jumping on my bike, pedalled furiously to the village. It was only too true. I could hear the shrill crying of the women as I approached. The men were digging the grave and the body, not yet cold, had been prepared for burial. Whether the lad had been 'helped' out of this world, I could not say; I baptized him conditionally, and could but commend him and his good intentions to the mercy of God. Then, sick at heart, I rode slowly back to the mission.

One does not easily associate humour with the administration of the Sacraments to a person who is dying, but sometimes there can be, in retrospect, a funny side even to these solemn and awful occasions. Mention has been made in a previous chapter of Rachael, the old blind leper woman of Pabiu. Poor Rachael was long a-dying, and weary though she must have been of this world she had hung on to life long beyond anybody's expectation. I had long since given her the last Sacraments and every day expected to hear that she had gone to heaven. One morning the Sister told me that the old woman did seem to be near her end and probably would not last the morning, so I went across to Pabiu to render her what assistance I could in her agony. The entrance to a Shilluk hut is a round hole no more than waist high so that one wishing to enter must bend double or even go on hands and knees to do so. Furthermore, the inside of the hut is in semi-darkness, and entering from the bright sunlight it takes a moment or two to accustom oneself to the surroundings. Hence, when I ducked through the doorway, I almost pitched headlong over a shapeless bundle